

Serving the Earth: A Theological Exploration of Earthiness

Further details

Anne Primavesi: Serving the Earth: A Theological Exploration of Earthiness

Anne Primavesi is a systematic theologian focusing on ecological issues. She gained a BD in theology (with Hebrew and Greek Scripture options) from London University. In 1987 she completed a PhD in systematic theology at Heythrop College, focusing on Luther, parable and the work of Jürgen Moltmann. In 1985 and 1987, she led Parable Workshops in Northern Ireland at the Corrymeela Summerfest. Resulting from engagement with local ecumenical groups, she co-authored a book with Jennifer Henderson called *Our God Has No Favourites: a Liberation Theology of the Eucharist* (1989).

From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity, was published in 1991. This led to her being asked by the World Council of Churches to attend their 1992 conference at Rio de Janeiro, convened at the same time as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. There she gave a keynote address on Militarism (a subject the UNCED conference would only discuss as 'Defence').

Since 1990 she had been a founder member of the European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR), contributing to their conferences and publications. As an independent researcher, she published widely in scholarly journals and lectured in the British Isles, Europe, and North America. After the millennium, she wrote what became a trilogy exploring the theological implications of James Lovelock's Gaia theory: *Sacred Gaia: Holistic Theology and Earth System Science* (2000), *Gaia's Gift: Earth, Ourselves and God after Copernicus* (2003), and *Gaia and Climate Change: A Theology of Gift Events* (2008). During that time she became a Research Fellow at Bristol University, pioneering a course in Environmental Theology then briefly held a Research Fellowship at Birkbeck College.

In 2002 she became a Fellow of the Jesus Seminar and Westar Institute. This led to *Making God Laugh: Human Arrogance and Ecological Humility* (2004) and *Cultivating Unity: within the Biodiversity of God* (2011), that explore ecological issues from a biblical perspective. Her latest book, tracing some historic religious and philosophical reasons for our lack of response to the challenge of climate change, is *Exploring Earthiness: The Reality and Perception of Being Human Today*.

Helena Kettleborough: proposing a new participatory paradigm

This paper builds on a number of elements of Anne Primavesi's work. The first is Anne's discussion of gift events in her final part of her Gaia Trilogy. I suggest that the concept of the Dream of the Earth from Thomas Berry can be seen as a gift event, as can the concept of forgiveness from Jesus in the New Testament. In 'Exploring Earthiness', Anne, analyses the worldview that humanity owns the earth and the historical, cultural and religious roots of the crisis. In this paper, I look at how we might respond to some of these barriers, offering ways forward. The solutions proposed are from daily life and arise out of research for my PhD and practical work in communities. Drawing on Anne's ideas and contributions, the audience will be invited to undertake a journey using free fall writing and drawing.

Helena is co-coordinator of Greater Manchester GreenSpirit Group. She obtained her PhD from Lancaster University Business School in 2014 and works at Manchester Metropolitan University as Associate Lecturer on Responsible Business and as co-facilitator of a CELT research project on

creativity in learning. Together with Phil Barton, she founded the networking Centre for Connected Practice (c4cp.net) working on emerging issues of Community, Creativity and Cosmos.

John Hughes: after Brueggemann: an exercise in creative hermeneutics

This presentation is a new take on 2nd Isaiah's call to the exiled in Babylon to know forgiveness and to return home from the comfortable thrall of 'technological consumerism' ... towards and with and for our 'common home' (*Laudato Si*): Jerusalem and the earth. It takes the form of three poems interspersed by a meditative song:

1. *Isaiah in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon*: a meditation on the desecration of the earth, Here Isaiah is a American army officer sent to measure depleted uranium levels in a burial site, in the cradle of civilization. Where lies forgiveness here?
2. *Isaiah in the Trafford Centre*: a playful meditation on consumption in an all too familiar recreational Babylon. Here Isaiah is misspelled as prophet and water the medium of forgiveness and redemption.
3. *Isaiah on a wing and a prayer and a rainbow*: An in-flight meditation that explores the costs of migration both human and creaturely on the journey home. Here Isaiah is pilot, bird and refugee; the medium is air and hope.

John has been Priest in Charge of St John's Old Trafford since 2006. In 2012, through the creation of a community energy co-op, St John's became the first Anglican church in Manchester to install solar panels: [stjohnssunshine](#) In 2015 he was appointed Manchester Diocese's Environmental Officer.

Anna Huxley: Emergent Gaia - Global Warming and Global Earthly Identity

This paper will examine the work of Primavesi on Gaia and God in the context of global warming. Examining how the Gaia theory can contribute to shaping a global Earthly identity by providing a sense of planet. Exploring how an understanding of the Gaia theory can help foster a global earthly identity and when joined with God how this identity can shape or inform responses to global warming. I will also ask the question of whether Primavesi's understanding of Gaia and God is compatible with the narrative of the universe as inspired by the work of Thomas Berry.

Anna is a PhD candidate at the University of Manchester under the supervision of Professor Peter Scott. Her research is focused on faith based organisations in the UK who are campaigning for action on climate change specifically examining their motivations, methods and the barriers which hinder the achievement of their goals. More widely she is interested in the relationships between religion and politics especially in the context of ecology.

Terry Biddington: Primavesi's challenge to the churches

While 'care for the environment' has recently been added to the historic 'four marks' of the universal church, there is a recognition amongst theologians that Christian doctrine may itself have encouraged a disregard for creation: not least with many interpretations of the belief in Jesus as redeemer. Primavesi has written that 'theological truth cannot remain unaffected by the contemporary ecological crisis (*From Apocalypse to Genesis*).' So what needs to change? *Terry is the Lead Chaplain for the Manchester universities. As a theologian he is engaged in a four-part book series exploring the relationship between spirituality and religion, church and risk-taking. His latest project 'Theology for Earthlings'-much influenced by Primavesi's thinking- tries to imagine*

what theology would look like if its starting point isn't Jesus' redemption of the world because of Adam's 'Fall' but his (and our) embodiment of Adam and Eve's human earthiness.

Jack Christian: Gaia, inter-connectedness and co-operation: the need for stakeholder engagement

In writing about Gaia Anne Primavesi emphasises humanity's connection to Planet Earth. We are indeed formed from the dust of the earth and brought into life in a wondrous way. Anne traces this way forwards and backwards through time showing our connection to the rest of creation through the lens of evolution and seeing in this kaleidoscope of life the work of God.

For me the wonder of life itself is sufficient and whilst its ultimate source remains a mystery to me, I firmly believe in this connection – inter-connection even – of life in all its forms, and with the planet itself. A view shared by numerous others but I could include John Muir, Albert Schweitzer, Baird Callicott and Arne Naess to name but a few.

From this perspective it is clear we must respect not just our fellow human beings but with the whole of creation itself. We must seek to work in harmony with our planet rather than exploit it, we must in fact co-operate with Gaia. This has many lessons for a mankind that has become obsessed with competition, acquisition and self-interest. Amongst these lessons is the need to think about the 'Other' that is those who/that which we impact on. In the world of business that calls for stakeholder engagement.

Jack is a Senior Lecturer in the Accounting, Finance and Economics department at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School. His main areas of interest are ethics and sustainability accounting. Prior to joining the Business School in 2007 he worked as a practising accountant for 30 years holding various positions including Finance Director and European Financial Controller. His interest in nature dates back to his childhood in the 1950s and 60s and in the intervening years he has taken part in many voluntary survey schemes and contributed records to bird, butterfly and other naturalist organisations.

Kelvin Ravenscroft The Journey of the Universe: engaging the local community

This presentation reflects upon the experience of a Manchester Journey of the Universe group which explored together the radical ways of seeing and being in the world of Thomas Berry.

Kelvin has taught Religious Studies and Philosophy in a range of educational contexts including Secondary Schools and Further Education. He has developed and taught University courses exploring Spirituality and Personal Development and Ethics, Change and Personal Development and has led workshops internationally exploring the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) dimensions of teaching and learning.

Raj Patta: Saving Water: towards a Water Christology

In a context where water has been out of reach to Dalits because of their caste identities, to understand the person and work of Jesus Christ as Water is a challenge to the caste groups and a celebration to Dalits, for Jesus as Water is a solace and salvation for them. In the backdrop of this context, a proposal for Water Christology has been explored. This paper is a missiological reading of the person and work of Christ relevant for our times and context in India and elsewhere.

Raj is a PhD student at Manchester University writing a thesis on "Publicizing the 'non-public': Towards a Subaltern Public Theology for India" Raj is an ordained minister in the Andhra Evangelical

Lutheran Church of India. He self-describes as friendly, simple, willing to learn and unlearn with a view that life given is not to invest, but to live and make others live in all fullness.

Glynn Gorick: Picturing Gaia

Glynn is self-employed making pictures that are designed to show processes at work in nature and interactions with human society. In 1993 he sent pictures to Resurgence magazine, then to James Lovelock who invited him to show his paintings at three Gaia conferences where he met Anne Primavesi. Anne has since used Glynn's illustrations on four of her book covers. Today Glynn will present images of his work designed to support some of the conference topics.

A Note about the Installations

Gaia's Graveyards: February 2015

Newspapers for the whole of the month of February 2015 - at least one each day, bought or picked up as we travelled around, are shown in an abandoned glass bowed cabinet. They contain our human centred concerns - politics, fashion, sport travel. The only content relating to the 'sixth great species extinction' now underway we cut out and display from our garden birdfeeder. Those to the right are inspired by celebrity - and attracted more space than those led by science or evidence hung to the left. Nature has a marginal and ephemeral relationship to the human centred world as currently constructed through the media.

Gaia's Graveyards: 2000 – 2015

One cutting from each year since the Millennium mounted in memoriam for the species we have lost during that short time in the form of a downward trending graph.

We invite you to ponder the balance of the concerns of the human world and those of the more-than-human world. As you ponder the cuttings, we invite you to enter with sympathy into the perspective of the other beings who share the planet and consider the sixth great extinction in the 4,500,000,000 year history of Gaia taking place right now, and consider your personal response and what you can do.

The image on the programme cover is by Glynn Gorick for Primavesi's *Gaia and Climate Change: A Theology of Gift Events*